

## **March 10, 2025, City Council Meeting Minutes**

### **11. STUDY SESSION**

Receive a Presentation and Provide Direction to Staff on Site Furnishings, Paving Design and Materials, Special Elements, Lighting, Planting Palette, and Design Choices for the Water Feature on the 700 Block of Laurel Street and Harrington Park.

#### **Water Feature:**

CM Rak inquired about the budget for the water feature. He expressed a preference for the first design option, noting that he could envision children playing in it but was uncertain if the additional cost was justified. CM Rak views the area as an urban park with a modern aesthetic rather than a wooded setting and would prefer a fountain design that aligns with that theme, provided cost is not a concern.

VM Venkatesh shared that a water feature encouraging children's play would create more noise and unlike the Zen feel that people think of a water feature. She liked the fog concept for its uniqueness but was unsure how it would work. She preferred the sculptural rock option with plantings, seeing it as more organic, peaceful, and still engaging for children in fun ways, like adding boats.

CM Layton expressed concerns about the cost of Concept 1 and leaned towards Concept 2. He appreciated the creativity of the fog feature and its year-round concept. He also noted that a large water feature, like in concept 1, would take up a significant amount of space.

CM Dugan inquired about the safety concern in concept 1 and the various features. He also inquired who is drawn to fog, referring to concept 2. CM Dugan expressed his appreciation for the Interactive Blooms feature in concept 1, highlighting its role as a central gathering space for families, where children can engage while others dine. He noted its modular and flexible design, allowing it to be turned off for a more peaceful setting during pavilion events. Additionally, he acknowledged its benefit of providing extra seating in the area. CM Dugan shared that he is not too concerned about the budget for a signature design.

Mayor McDowell stated that she is not a fan of the concept 1 design because children will get wet and go inside a retail shop or restaurant soaking wet. She noted that San Carlos downtown is for retail and dining, it is not a park. Mayor McDowell commented that concept 2, the fog feature, is unsustainable and would prefer concept 3. She commented that there should be barriers around the fountain and no splash pads. Mayor McDowell wanted a feature that runs 24/7.

CM Rak inquired about the amount of water loss in the fog water feature option and the sizes of each option.

He also inquired if the consultants sought feedback from the downtown businesses on their thoughts of having a water feature downtown such as noise.

CM Rak shared that he leaned toward Concept 3, noting it is a better fit for the space and more suitable for accommodating events.

VM Venkatesh inquired if the fog would cool down the surrounding area.

CM Layton requested clarification from the Mayor on the goal of the evening—whether it was for the Council to reach consensus on a water feature or to determine a majority preference for one of the options.

CM Layton wanted to know if there are other options available other than the 3 that were presented.

CM Dugan requested clarification on the meaning of the term “interactive.” He asked the Council to consider a raised version of Option 1 for the water feature—one where people aren’t playing *in* it, but rather *with* it.

City Manager echoed CM Dugan’s thought.

CM Dugan did not support fog in downtown San Carlos.

Mayor McDowell stated they should consider the cost of the water feature and needed to understand the cost tradeoffs and not fall short on the budget.

CM Rak suggested that a fountain with occasional water bursts or intermittent activity could be a viable option.

CM Dugan commented that a common thread among the Council was incorporating a vertical stone element into the water feature.

### **Public Comment – Water Feature**

Sonia Elks (In-person) suggested piloting a section of misters that activate above 80°F to provide a refreshing, low-impact experience, especially for children. She recommended using runoff water from features to irrigate downtown landscaping. Additional ideas included incorporating color-changing elements and using mist or fog to add moisture to the air for comfort in dry conditions.

### **Paving Feature**

CM Layton inquired about the meaning of pathways. He shared his liking of using paving to distinguish the different functions or dynamics within the area. CM Layton commented that the public would appreciate clarification of flow patterns, such as centralized points and diagonal walking paths.

CM Dugan appreciated the thoughtfulness of the paving patterns but suggested keeping them casual and natural in appearance. He expressed that it would be ideal to use pavers that are not scooter-friendly, to discourage people from riding through the area.

CM Dugan, suggested to have the Donor pavers close to the pavilion instead of tucked away near the bathroom.

VM Venkatesh inquired about the maintenance of the pavers, considering the presence of foliage.

Mayor McDowell inquired about the outdoor dining setup, specifically whether there would be short partitions and how they might impact the pavers. She asked who is zoned for retail and restaurants that might potentially receive less space due to the bioretention areas, emphasizing that this is information the City should know sooner rather than later.

Mayor McDowell stated that the Council needs to set a policy direction for how outdoor dining should be implemented. She commented that streetscape and pavers are interwind and perhaps the Council needs to have another meeting to discuss.

CM Dugan shared that the European model was discussed at the Downtown subcommittee meeting. He shared that in his mind the seating would always be bistro tables, umbrellas, and no enclosure. It would be free flowing.

CM Dugan emphasized the need to review best practices for outdoor dining, noting that parklets were a temporary pandemic solution and should not dictate future space allocation. They stressed that outdoor dining should stay in front of restaurants—not spill into retail areas—and that the focus should be on creating a vibrant public square. The Council should approach this deliberately and reach consensus, given the expected strong community opinions.

CM Rak shared that he is unsure if the dining policy would have anything to do with the paver designs.

Mayor McDowell expressed concern about costs and asked whether it was necessary to have so many different colors of pavers. She inquired whether certain types of pavers might be difficult for people with disabilities to traverse.

### **Public Comment – Paving Features**

Sonia Elks (in-person) shared that there are alternative ways to deter scooters, such as using truncated domes, with examples seen at the major playground in Redwood City. She emphasized the importance of creating a designated space for active teens to help prevent disruptive behavior in other parts of Downtown.

### **Benches**

CM Dugan expressed a preference for the innovative concrete bench designs, noting that wood does not hold up well in outdoor weather conditions. He noted that steel or concrete could be comfortable as well.

CM Layton shared that he liked the look and feel of benches with integrated lighting and noted that he is not a strong supporter of movable furniture.

VM Venkatesh reiterated that wood would not work in this area, unless it is teak, which is expensive.

CM Rak reiterated the preference for using materials other than wood for benches. He agreed with CM Layton that movable furniture should be reserved for special occasions and not require daily handling by staff. He also suggested placing some backless benches in the center of the plaza to allow flexibility for people to turn around during performances and similar events.

Mayor McDowell commented that the City should consider the heat generated by the sun on benches during the summer months. She also wondered whether there is a way to anchor the furniture, noting that people often like to sit and enjoy their email.

VM Venkatesh shared her preference for the wood look, citing an example from the Palo Alto Medical Foundation. She noted that steel benches become uncomfortably hot to sit on during the summer.

CM Rak commented that tables should be provided so people can sit outside and enjoy their meals. Regarding benches, he expressed a preference for materials that require minimal maintenance and can withstand weather conditions.

CM Dugan expressed a preference for bench materials that offer a long-term solution. He proposed using metal benches for the urban plaza setting, while reserving more organic elements for the area around the Pavilion.

### **Other Furnishing**

CM Dugan shared that he liked the proposed contemporary furniture elements, appreciating the mix of urban and organic styles.

CM Rak expressed a preference for a more contemporary look. He emphasized the importance of including recycling, trash, and compost bins in the downtown area, stating that he wants San Carlos to demonstrate ecological leadership.

CM Rak inquired whether the consultant team had consulted with an arborist to ensure appropriate tree sizing and to confirm that the trees would grow well together and remain healthy.

VM Venkatesh inquired about the design of the bridge and whether it would resemble the one shown in the photos. She expressed concern that children might fall into it.

Mayor McDowell shared that she would like to know the cost of the various bollard options and noted that all the proposed designs looked great.

### **Public Comment - Furnishings**

Sonia Elks (in-person) emphasized the importance of including bike racks and suggested that incorporating more artistic designs would be a nice touch.

### **Planting and Trees**

VM Venkatesh shared her concern with Crepe Myrtle and the California Sycamore trees.

CM Rak expressed a dislike for deciduous trees. He said he liked the Crepe Myrtle for corner plantings, noting that they are not large trees. He also expressed a preference for plants that are more native to the area.

CM Layton expressed agreement with CM Rak and VM Venkatesh, noting that the most frequent complaints from the public involve sap on the pavement and other droppings, such as acorns. They emphasized the importance of selecting plantings that help keep the area clean. He also voiced support for incorporating more California native plants into the downtown area, both for maintenance benefits and to enhance the local thematic identity.

CM Dugan expressed appreciation for the variety of colors in the proposed plants and trees. He agreed with other Councilmembers on the importance of maintaining cleanliness in the area. He also shared his dislike for evergreen trees, citing their large size and resemblance to Christmas trees, and expressed a preference for deciduous trees.

Mayor McDowell inquired about the possibility of aphids being present on the plants. She also expressed her appreciation for the Sycamore evergreen trees. Additionally, she asked whether the bioretention area had expanded. Mayor McDowell emphasized the importance of ensuring that the bioretention area does not encroach upon the 700 block of Laurel Street, as this area is designated for retail and dining purposes.

CM Dugan stated that if they believe the bioretention area is too large, the City can always install a storm drain as an alternative.

### **Public Comments – Plantings**

Sonia Elks (In-person) propose placing a metal grate over large bioretention areas, with a picnic table or bike racks on top, allowing water flow while making the space usable.

### **Lighting**

CM Dugan expressed a preference for more contemporary lighting options. He mentioned that he had never heard of catenary lighting before but liked the sense of place that the lantern-style lighting provides.

CM Rak agreed with CM Dugan on the catenary lights and a more contemporary lighting option. He liked the upper left and lower right lighting options.

CM Layton agreed with his fellow council members and requested clarification on the decision regarding aerial lighting.

CM Rak appreciated catenary lights throughout downtown which makes the area more inviting.

Mayor McDowell liked the catenary lights as well but noted that she is unsure how that fits in the overall light scheme of downtown. She also shared that she did not like the contemporary light.

Mayor McDowell shared that she once visited a town called Winter Park in Florida, where the streetlamps were "smart" allowing people to charge their phones and featuring small speakers that played music.

CM Dugas expressed support for the lights but questioned using them along the entire block, suggesting it might dilute their impact. He sees the lights as a way to highlight special areas, such as near a future fountain with unique lighting. He recommended involving a consultant to explore options, including different light styles or sizes, perhaps even a commercial version of fairy lights for places like Harrington Park.

CM Dugas expressed his linking of bollard lights and bench lights.

VM Venkatesh noted that the final choice should be based on cost and what makes the most sense.

## **Special Element**

CM Dugan expressed a desire for the special element to be both artistic and functional, ideally serving as something children can also play on. He liked the idea of a chessboard and suggested adding a ping pong table that could double as a dining table. CM Dugan also expressed interest in having a cornhole game in the downtown area.

VM Venkatesh expressed a preference for chalkboards and chalk, allowing children to be creative rather than simply observing something. She favored a more organic approach and shared an example from San Diego, where trees are incorporated into the space in a way that allows kids to climb on them.

CM Rak appreciated the elements presented by the consultants. He liked the idea of interactive features and suggested that some of them could be seasonal, brought out occasionally to enhance the experience.

CM Layton emphasize viewing these areas as opportunities rather than immediately committing to structures or play equipment. For example, a play sculpture might be a great fit for Harrington Park to start with, while leaving room to add other elements gradually over time.

CM Dugan encouraged collaboration with the Parks and Recreation Department, noting their ongoing Centennial celebrations, including installing historical markers with QR codes around town. He suggested designating a spot in the Centennial Plaza and placing one of these markers there to highlight San Carlos's history.

Mayor McDowell expressed her support for the Ping Pong table idea and inquired whether the consultant team is collaborating with Art Bias to potentially create a project for the 700 block

### **Public Comment – Special Element**

Sonia Elks (in-person) stressed the importance of engaging teenagers and proposed two ideas. First, she suggested creating a pump track for kids on wheels, which should be accessible to the downtown. Second, she recommended organizing a mystery or trivia challenge where participants move around the town to solve clues, with a prize like \$100 and potential business sponsorships. In addition, Sonia advised incorporating interactive elements like short tree trunks or rocks for walk on them, as they encourage movement and play, rather than relying on a single static structure.

Nathan (via Zoom) suggested adding a community board along with a directory of retail shops and restaurants.